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Alumnus spends summer at state capitol

August 29, 2014

 Photo with GOV and First Lady



William Bell earned his [Masters of Public Administration](#) degree from Georgia Southern in May and immediately left for Atlanta to work as the strategic planning and stimulus accountability intern in Gov. Nathan Deal's Office of Planning and Budget. Under the direction of Strategic Planning Coordinator Alice Zimmerman, Bell said he most enjoyed assisting the OPB with its statewide strategic-planning process.

"State agencies are required to submit an annual strategic plan to the OPB," he said. "OPB analysts review the plans and communicate any revisions to the submitting agency. This process encourages state agencies to implement their core missions in more accountable ways by establishing goals and measurable objectives and developing specific strategies to carry out those goals."

Strategic planning is a valuable, in-demand skill because it is known to allow organizations to become more efficient and to strategically achieve their goals.

Bell said he learned about the internship through a notification sent out by the University's Institute for Public and Nonprofit Studies. He prepared his resume and cover letter and had both critiqued by the University's Office of Career Services. Once he secured the interview, he also brushed-up on the core functions of the OPB and made sure he knew how to relate his previous work- and educational-experiences to them.

"My experiences in IPNS definitely helped me obtain the internship with the OPB," he said. "Skills such as the ability to make meaningful contributions to in-class discussions translate well in an interview setting, coming to class prepared is sound practice for doing the necessary research to have a memorable application and job interview, and soft-skills like learning how to interact with colleagues in a professional setting are also important."

Bell, who also earned his undergraduate degree in political science at Georgia Southern, said that the MPA course Public Sector Budgeting, taught by Assistant Professor P. Cary Christian, Ph.D., was among the most influential in the master's program. During that class, which occurred about the same time as the federal government's budgetary debates and imminent shut-downs, students examined the fundamentals of public budgeting and analyzed the federal budget.

"Our semester-long project was to attempt to balance the federal budget," Bell said. "This project was fascinating to complete, as students really surpassed the rhetoric of popular news outlets and even elected officials in Washington D.C. to understand that budgeting is policy – the programs or projects a government chooses to fund or de-fund can be taken broadly as a policy statement."

Bell said that throughout his studies he was most passionate about local government. He therefore chose to work with local municipalities for the service-learning opportunities provided by the degree program and for its required internship.

“What I enjoy most about local government is that cities and counties are continually on the leading-edge of public-sector innovation,” he said. “To complete my MPA, I interned with the city of Thomaston, and the experience was really a glimpse of how complex it is to manage a municipality, even one with a population of less than 10,000 people.”

During that internship, Bell worked with the city manager of Thomaston on projects ranging from contract management, research related to local option sales taxes, and implementing the Americans with Disabilities Act’s Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan.

“I chose to pursue my Master’s in Public Administration at Georgia Southern because it was a familiar place with familiar faculty,” Bell said. “However, I feel that the program really was the best for me. Georgia Southern and IPNS continue to maintain outstanding academic instruction and challenging curricula. The rigorous coursework, professional and knowledgeable faculty, and my graduate assistantship with the Department of Political Science all made my happy to have continued my education at Georgia Southern.”

Bell completed his internship with the OPB in August and said that it served to reinforce what he learned during his master’s courses. He is now seeking employment in a planning or budget department of a state or local government.

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